

G.S.A. Official Defends Document Center on Coast

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LAGUNA NIGUEL, Calif., Oct. 15—A Government official said today that the huge new Federal document center here, instead of being a "white elephant," ranked as one of the best deals ever made by the Government.

Nearly half the space in the 1,017,000-square-foot building, acquired by the General Services Administration seven months ago, has already been assigned to Federal agencies and negotiations are under way on other long-term leases, he said.

"I know that some people have been calling it a white elephant but I consider it to be one of the best, most profitable deals the government ever made," said Richard Laws, the G.S.A. agent in charge of lining up tenants for the seven-story structure.

'No Pressing Need'

He acknowledged that, before the \$25-million industrial building, which is one-third the size of the Pentagon, was taken over from the Rockwell International Corporation in a property trade last March, "there really was no pressing need for a Federal documents center in this area."

"However, the deal was just too good to pass up," Mr. Laws added. "We prepared a hypothetical plan, based on requirements in the San Diego-Los Angeles area, and we figured that one way or another we could use the building to very good advantage."

Regional officials of the G.S.A. denied reports that the primary purpose in acquiring the building was to afford then President Nixon easy access to his White House tapes and records in a vault that was to have cost \$110,000, with an additional Government expenditure of \$50,000 for its protection by around-the-clock armed guards.

Near San Clemente

The pyramidal, terraced building, which resembles a huge Mayan temple, is only 11 miles across the Laguna Hills from Mr. Nixon's oceanfront estate at San Clemente.

"It's ridiculous, aside from the fact that negotiations for the building began in the summer of 1971, long before the Presidential crisis leading to Mr. Nixon's Aug. 9 resignation, to say that a building of over a million square feet was selected for the principal purpose of serving as a repository for a relatively small volume of Mr.

Nixon's records," G.S.A. official said.

In return for the Lagan Niguel structure, which was completed by Rockwell International three and a half years ago for its Autonetics Division but was never occupied because of defense cutbacks, the company acquired two wartime surplus defense plants that it had been leasing from the Government.

Plants in California

Both plants are in California—one in Canoga Park and the other at the Los Angeles International Airport. In addition, Rockwell acquired large amounts of Government-owned machinery and other industrial hardware used in company-owned plants.

Plans to build the \$110,000 vault have been suspended as a result of action by Congress in

slashing more than three-fourths of the \$850,000 sought by the Ford Administration for Mr. Nixon's transition to private life.

The Nixon tapes and records that would have gone into nearly 2 million cubic feet of space set aside for the National Archives were said to total no more than about 30,000 cubic feet.

Mr. Laws said that other tenants were preparing to begin construction work on their storage areas within the next week or two, including the Internal Revenue Service, the Geological Survey and the Fish and Wildlife Administration.

But he added that it may take a year to fill the building and said he was unable to speculate on how many Federal agencies would ultimately be housed in the storage center.